# Applying for the Mandela Washington Fellowship: The importance of being a leader

Lee Mark du Preez 

(Courtesy photo)

When South African Lee Mark du Preez first heard of the Mandela Washington Fellowship, he knew it was an opportunity for him to take the work he'd been doing in his community to the next level. Since his school years he'd been on the board of the Children's Home in his town of Pietermaritzburg, which helps orphaned, abandoned and abused children. He had also worked as an entrepreneur and consultant on South Africa's black economic empowerment initiative.

But when he applied for the fellowship in 2013, he was not among those invited to come to Washington. The next year du Preez applied a second time, and this time the outcome was very different as he was selected to be a 2015 Mandela Washington Fellow.

What changed between his first application and the second, and why did he become a better candidate the second time he applied?

He remained on the board of the Children's Home but doubled his efforts to get involved, giving more of his time and taking on more responsibilities. In addition, he became an advisory board member at the University of KwaZulu-Natal for Enactus, a global student organization that uses the power of entrepreneurship to create positive social change. Enactus teams from 1,600 universities in 36 countries compete for the best plan with the greatest impact. His chapter, du Preez said with no small amount of pride, has "won the championship in South Africa five times. We've never not made the semifinals."

He was also asked by the leader of his local chamber of business to create a youth leadership and business development program. "I became more involved in programs that run on a larger scale," he said, which he believes helped his application to stand out in a way it hadn't before.

"Absolutely keep trying," he said, when asked what he would advise applicants for the MWF who have applied and not been selected. "They must keep trying like I did. But they should also continue to develop and raise their profiles, so that by the time they do try again, they can be so good that it's almost impossible for them to be ignored."

# Applying for the Mandela Washington Fellowship: Pitching yourself in the

# personal essay

Whether you're writing an essay to apply for admission to university, graduate school or the Mandela Washington Fellowship, your job is the same: demonstrating to the decision-makers that you're the person to choose. That's the essence of a "pitch," whether in business meeting or a personal essay.

In the case of the Mandela Washington Fellowship, focusing on "how to write a personal essay is the most important," according to Edward Monster, public affairs officer in Malawi who reviews applications for the Fellowship. "Too many applicants used the essays to describe 'big-picture' problems in their country or region," said Monster, "but failed to describe exactly what they as individuals were doing to confront the specific challenges in their communities."

# **Emphasize outcomes**

"Sometimes we focus on things we've done" — an initiative or a job we undertook — "but we don't talk about what the result of that was," said executive coach Patty Beach, who is a managing partner of Leadership Smarts. By describing the tangible benefits created by your previous work, you can overcome what Beach calls the "'So what?' factor," which leaves the decision-makers uncertain whether your work had any measurable value or not.

# Remember three things

Beach suggests thinking about three things before writing an essay: what you're good at (your natural and cultivated talents), what you're passionate about (the area to which you'll direct your talents), and how what you're applying for will help further your goals. "If you can effectively communicate those three things, you put yourself in the best position to be selected."

# **Enough but not too much**

Shawn Abbott, dean of admissions at New York University, has seen more than enough admissions essays to know what works when it comes to selling yourself to an admissions board. He suggests limiting your personal statement to one page. "Admissions officers are reading hundreds, if not thousands, of applications. We have to be able to read quickly, and you want to capture our attention. One page is enough."

# Think before you share

Abbott also advises giving thought to what parts of your worldview to emphasize in a personal essay. The Fellowship application emphasizes what you have done and plan to do to support your communities, so focus on your actions and outcomes. There may be different taboos for you to avoid for different types of applications, so think hard about what they might be before you put pen to paper.

# **#YALI Network Events Across Africa**

Aspiring entrepreneurs in Kigali, Rwanda (Courtesy photo)

In the two months since we launched #YALILearns, there has been a flurry of activity among #YALINetwork members organizing and sharing events in our Facebook face2face group. Dozens of meetings and hundreds of people have shared their knowledge and connected with other young African leaders across the continent.

Papy Sibomana got together a group of prospective young entrepreneurs in Kigali, Rwanda, to teach business and entrepreneurship using the YALI Network Online Courses. There was also discussion of the #YALINetwork and its benefits for younger entrepreneurs and an overview of the Mandela Washington Fellowship application process.

Discussing the activities of the Regional Leadership Center at a meeting in Addis Ababa. (Courtesy photo)

In Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, Frehiwot Negash joined with Yigrem Ashenafi, Asmeret Gebre, Edie Zachs and Helina Stiphanos to organize a #YALILearns event and even created a separate Facebook group.

"It was so inspirational," Frehiwot said. "We look forward to our next monthly event."

Zakariyyah Freeman Musa, a Nigerian working in Kenya, connected with the U.S. Embassy in Tanzania to develop a #YALILearns event at the American Corner in Zanzibar. Thirty people discussed the YALI Network Online Courses on leadership and took the quiz to get their certificates.

YALILearns meeting in Harare (Courtesy photo)

Southern Africa was particularly active, including Vincent T. Mabotja's event in South Africa to discuss xenophobia and another that involved a march against corruption. In neighboring Zimbabwe, several events took off.

"#YALILearns is an amazing tool to seeing people grow and develop ideas into actual projects and livelihood," said Kelvin Tinashe Mutize after a networking event he organized with #yalicreatives in Harare.

Munya Bloggo, a 2015 🗷

Mandela Washington Fellow, teaches business in Gweru, Zimbabwe. (Courtesy photo)

Munya Bloggo shared another Zimbabwe event, this time in the central part of the country where several Network members used the YALI Network Online Courses to discuss business planning and modeling at the American Corner in Gweru.

"We had a feisty discussion with students on how we can apply the lessons to a local context," Munya said, before adding a competitive element to #YALILearns. "I think when it comes to advancing education, Zimbabweans go at it like it was the Olympics."

Just north, in Zambia, Patience Chisanga shared her expertise at a multi-day event.

"I spoke to 25 young talented and exceptional filmmakers about redefining entrepreneurship, the importance of turning art into a business, the basics of developing a business idea, a business plan, and how to deliver a business pitch to investors," she said.

YALINetwork members take a quiz on leadership for a YALINetwork certificate at a meeting in Zanzibar, Tanzania. (Courtesy photo)

To the west, Ruddy Kielo Lingela held an event that utilized the YALI business lessons in Lubumbashi, #DRC, at the American Space there.

"More than 20 young entrepreneurs were present," he said. "I was much impressed (with the audience). All the participants arrived 30 minutes before the launch of the meetup. The Congo is changing my friends."

Over in Ghana, Oxford Bonsu put together a group of 320 undergraduates at Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology for an event.

A huge YALILearns event in Ghana saw ≥ 320 people show up for a meeting organized by Oxford Bonsu. (Courtesy photo)

"I used resources from YALI Learns to engage the students, and there was a positive feedback," he said. "#YALILearns is a sure way to give back to your community and to empower young Africans to make real difference."

If you want to hold your own <u>#YALILearns</u> event, you do not need any special tools or experience, just a willingness to gather people together and share knowledge. Use our courses or your own material, but please do share the results with us on our <u>#YALILearns</u> feedback page.

Patience Chisanga, a 2015 Mandela ▼ Washington Fellow, teaches about

# Watchful eyes keep elections fair

An election observer at a polling station in Nairobi during Kenya's 2013 election (© AP Images)

The surest way to get fair elections, according to experts, is to have as many eyes as possible on every step of the process. With several countries in Africa holding presidential elections in October and November, citizen groups that monitor elections will play important roles in assuring that the results are fair and credible.

The Global Network of Domestic Election Monitors (GNDEM) represents 190 watchdog groups in 75 countries on five continents. In 2012, the organization launched the <u>Declaration of Global Principles</u> for Nonpartisan Election Observation and Monitoring by Citizen Organizations in a ceremony at the United Nations. The document spells out standards for citizens who work to keep elections fair.

The document matters because monitoring doesn't work without a careful plan. "You can't monitor everything," said Michelle Brown of National Democracy Institute (NDI), a nonprofit organization that supplies technical assistance to GNDEM's local watchdogs. "They have to focus," Brown said. "They have to figure out what are the salient issues that could have the biggest impact."

A woman registers to vote using a fingerprint reader in Lagos, Nigeria. (© AP Images)

NDI helps the monitors create checklists for use in the field. Groups such as NDI train both long-term observers, who monitor how electoral boundaries are established, voter registration and ballot qualification, and short-term observers, who focus on election-day procedures.

What does it look like when election monitoring is thorough? "Nigeria is a great example," Brown said. Four prominent civil-society groups representing diverse interests came together to form Project Swift Count to monitor the 2015 Nigerian general election. "They did a very good job of early outreach and making people aware of who they were," Brown said. "They had a nationwide network, really nice pre-election reports, and then, in a very timely way, released their election-day findings."

Volunteering your time to help groups that monitor elections is a great investment in fair elections in your country. Contact these organizations in <a href="Cote D'Ivoire">Cote D'Ivoire</a>, <a href="Guinea">Guinea</a>, <a href="Mail">Mali</a>, <a href="Tanzania">Tanzania</a> and <a href="Uganda">Uganda</a> to

# Applying to be a Mandela Washington Fellow: Tips from a 2014 Fellow

Nigerian entrepreneur Adepeju Jaiyeoba meets President ▼ Obama. (White House/Pete Souza)

The 2016 Mandela Washington Fellowship application is now open! Adepeju Jaiyeoba, a 2014 Mandela Washington Fellow, has put together the following tips for YALI Network members on preparing a great application.

### Story of change

What's your driving force? What motivates you to do the work you do? What's your story? Do not spend a paragraph on this. Trust me, a line is more than sufficient.

### Understand the questions asked

Don't be too quick to provide answers to the questions. Understand the questions asked, as every question is aimed at discovering certain things about you as an individual and leader.

## Demonstrate practical knowledge of the needs of your community

Let your writing show you understand the problem of your community. Connect the problem to reallife stories and situations to drive home your point and let your solution not be in doubt.

#### Emphasize that you are a leader who takes initiative

Communities across Africa have varying challenges. In your own little corner of the world, before the opportunity to apply for this fellowship, tell about how you have been helping your community solve pressing problems.

#### **Proofread your application**

Every year, thousands of applicants apply for the Mandela Washington Fellowship. The applications are not scored by robots or machines — they are scored by human beings, which is why you should really proofread your application and rid it of errors so you do not turn off the markers.

## Don't confuse the marker

A lot of times we are involved in a series of businesses as well as running different NGOs, which in many cases are unrelated. For example, you could be selling fabrics, be into waste management, run an NGO on climate change and still want to keep girls in school. Completing the application may be a real challenge to you as you may want to put all of your various aspects into the application. This may only end up confusing the marker. Let there be a sequential flow in your thoughts and writings so you don't get the marker scrolling up to check your name and be sure he's still scoring the same

application he started out with.

Visit <u>yali.state.gov/apply</u> for more tips and information on preparing a great application.

# American Conservationist Learns from Kenya

Join #YALIGoesGreen this month. Learn how to get involved at <a href="mailto:yali.state.gov/climate">yali.state.gov/climate</a>

By Karin Rives

Adam Whelchel of The Nature Conservancy with Wangari Maathai, the founder of Kenya's Green Belt Movement. (The Nature Conservancy)

After practicing and preaching environmental conservation for the past 60 years, The Nature Conservancy knows a thing or two about strategy. So when Adam Whelchel, a conservation director for the U.S.-based group, traveled to Kenya in 2009, he thought he would teach the Green Belt Movement in Nairobi how to, well, run an environmental movement.

Instead, he says, "I walked away as a student."

In fact, the 38-year-old Green Belt Movement (GBM) is a formidable force in the struggle to protect East Africa's threatened water and forest resources. On its list of accomplishments is the planting of some 45 million trees, not a small feat in a country where competition over land is fierce.

Whelchel said he has been humbled by GBM's remarkable ability to overcome conflicts and bring together people with different interests. "I saw that in every village I worked with them. People show a tremendous pride over their relationship with GBM," he said.

He was also impressed by the commitment he witnessed. GBM staff, he said, will put in 14-hour days to try to save their country's environment — and then still have energy for a joke at the end of the day.

The ability to laugh, no matter how big their challenges, Whelchel said, may give the conservationists in Africa an edge over many of their peers in other parts of the world.

# **Planting a Grass-roots Organization**

Wangari Maathai, who founded the Green Belt Movement in Kenya, won the Nobel Peace Prize for her work in environmental conservation and women's rights. (© AP Images)

GBM's world-renowned founder, Wangari Maathai, began small in the late 1970s, gathering village women to grow seedlings and plant trees. After operating under the government's radar during the early years, her rapidly expanding movement caught the attention of Kenya's then-president, Daniel arap Moi. He and others in power didn't appreciate the fact that women were organizing on their own.

In an old public speech shown in a 2008 documentary about Maathai's work, Moi can be seen criticizing a "certain woman" who had dared to rally other women to plant trees. "According to African traditions," Moi said with a wry smile, "women must respect their men."

But Maathai continued, fearlessly, to organize communities in the country's semi-arid countryside, winning over more women and eventually men, teachers, children and politicians. In 2004, she became the first African woman to win the Nobel Peace Prize for her efforts. Maathai stayed involved with the group's advocacy campaigns while writing articles and books at a prolific pace until her death in 2011.

Moi left power years ago, but East Africa's environmental challenges remain. Today, GBM enjoys support from the Kenyan government as well as from seasoned environmental groups such as The Nature Conservancy. GBM staffers in Nairobi, London and Washington continue working to recruit new activists and obtain funding to increase the organization's impact.

## **Strategy for a Growing Movement**

The Green Belt Movement teaches environmental education to Kenyan schoolchildren. (The Nature Conservancy)

Whelchel traveled from his office in Connecticut to Nairobi to help GBM take what he calls "a business approach to conservation."

"It's a way to think strategically about what priorities do we have and what actions need to be taken to achieve those priorities, and to then measure the outcome," Whelchel said. "Without such plans ... your messaging isn't as sharp. People want to see a return on the investments and how their efforts have made a difference, and without having a way to measure, you're less effective in telling that story."

The Nature Conservancy returned Whelchel to Kenya in January 2011, this time to conduct a workshop focused on how GBM can incorporate watershed management in its strategy for Kenya and other parts of Africa.

Trees are critical to a healthy ecosystem because they help retain rainwater and replenish groundwater supplies. Kenya, however, has lost almost its entire forest cover in the past half-century

due to illegal logging, tea plantations, and pressures from a growing population that must clear land to grow food.

Today, only 6 percent of the country is covered by trees.

Deforestation has aggravated droughts and also affected energy supplies. Kenya depends on hydropower for 44 percent of its electricity, making the entire economy vulnerable to water shortages.

"The prognosis is not good, and one thing they need for sure is more forest that can capture and filter more rainwater for the people who need it," Whelchel said.

Wanjira Mathai, the daughter of the movement's founder and its international liaison, said she remembers her mother telling her and her siblings at an early age to fight for what they believe in. Mathai (who spells her last name without the double a) has since earned a business degree and transitioned from a job in public health to work full time for GBM.

"We have benefited tremendously from the exchange of technical knowledge that has enabled us to not only do our work more efficiently, but also talk about our work in ways that demonstrate the impact," she said.

Today, GBM is stronger than it has ever been as it networks with similar organizations in other parts of the African continent and with people in power.

"It's one of the things that has become so wonderful," Mathai said. "The government is the custodian of these forests, so we need to be working with them."

# Farming's Climate-Changed Future

A hand spread over dry, cracked earth.



Agriculture in sub-Saharan Africa — which employs 65 percent of Africa's labor force and accounts for 32 percent of its gross domestic product — has looked the same for generations: a majority of smallholder farmers growing crops and raising livestock on land they use to both feed their families and earn their living. But with the effects of climate change already being felt across the continent, those who want to continue to earn their living through farming will need to adapt to the realities of the effects of climate change.

A report from the World Bank forecasts a 4 degrees Celsius global warming by the end of the century, with the sea level rising up to 100 centimeters. Droughts are expected to increase in central and southern Africa, along with unprecedented extremes of heat. The same report predicts increased annual precipitation in the Horn of Africa and parts of East Africa that will increase the

risk of flooding. With 96 percent of cropland in Africa being rain-fed, the continent is dependent on the climate. And the climate is changing.

"The main people affected by climate change in my country are small farmers," said Aicha Sako, a 2015 Mandela Washington Fellow from Mali who works on climate adaptation strategies. Sako says that practices such as choosing crops than can adapt to longer rainfalls, crop diversification and landscape mapping (determining different soil types and how they can be used most efficiently) will be important to small farmers' survival.

Studies show that crops such as maize, sorghum and millet are vulnerable to the elevated levels of carbon dioxide that climate change will bring. Plants such as wheat, rice, cassava and yam, however, are more resistant to elevated carbon-dioxide levels — and in some cases will even have a positive response to those conditions.

"Farmers need to think about which crops they can use, where they use them and when," said Sako, "to save energy and make their businesses sustainable."

Join #YALIGoesGreen this month. Learn how to get involved at yali.state.gov/climate

# Applying to be a Mandela Washington Fellow: Common Questions

For each of the past two years, staff from the U.S. Department of State have answered questions from YALI Network members about applying for the Mandela Washington Fellowship of the Young African Leaders Initiative.

As Network members begin to prepare their applications for the 2016 Mandela Washington Fellowship, we took a look back at some of the common questions we've answered in person on completing the application, the process for applying, and what applicants need to know about the Mandela Washington Fellowship.

#### On how Mandela Washington Fellows are selected ...

You have to be a citizen of a sub-Saharan African country and have to be residing in a sub-Saharan African country. You should be proficient in English, and between the ages of 25 and 35 at the time of your application. You should have a proven record of leadership or accomplishment in public service, business/entrepreneurship or civic engagement. We also like to see a demonstrated commitment to public or community service, to volunteerism or mentorship. We are looking for someone who has the ability to work cooperatively in diverse groups and who respects the opinions of others — someone with demonstrated knowledge or experience in the track for which you are applying. The essays and the applications that you submit are very important, because we want to see people who've had a track record of making change and are looking forward to making change

as we move forward. One must be energetic and positive. The most important criteria is to have a real commitment to return to Africa and put your new leadership skills into use to benefit your community and country.

## On English proficiency ...

We're looking for applicants who have English that is good enough to participate in an academic program in the United States. There is no TOEFL test, but we ask applicants to self-rate their English on their applications. There are also the essays that must be well-written in English. There will be an interview process and we will get a feel for whether you actually can speak English or not. It will become apparent whose English is strong. If you make it to the semifinalist round and are interviewed at the U.S. Embassy or somewhere else in your country, the staff there will of course be holding the interview in English.

### On applying from a different country than where you permanently reside ...

We are looking for candidates who are living in sub-Saharan Africa and who are committed to the future of their continent and home country. For the purposes of this program, we don't look at Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Libya, and Egypt as part of sub-Saharan Africa. Interviews for the Fellowship will be occurring in sub-Saharan Africa. If you are applying in sub-Saharan Africa but in a different country in sub-Saharan Africa from which you normally reside (maybe you are studying or working in another country), the embassy in the country in which you're currently living will likely be able to do the interview for you and then transmit that back to our embassy in your home country to make a decision.

## On setting quotas ...

We value diversity in the United States and hope to reflect this in the Washington Fellowship program. We want a diverse group of countries, ethnic groups, religions, gender, and physical abilities. We are looking for a diverse group of opinions as well. We are looking for the full range of people who make up African society. We expect to have people participating in this program from every country in sub-Saharan Africa. Ultimately, we want to make sure we have a representative group of individuals from across the continent as a whole.

#### On what documentation to include with your application ...

The key thing we are looking for is demonstrated leaders. It really is up to you what documents you decide you'd like to upload, so I would just suggest that you pick the documents that you think best reflect either your professional expertise or your leadership capacity. If you have trouble demonstrating that in a documented form because of various reasons outside your control, we would still like to take a look at your application. An important part of the application is the essays where you have the opportunity to demonstrate what you have accomplished and what your goals are for your future.

#### On which Fellowship track to choose ...

A candidate who has experience in a particular track (Business & Entrepreneurship, Public Management, Civic Leadership) will be a stronger candidate than someone who has never worked in

that area. But we welcome all who want to apply, both those who currently work in a particular track and those who have an intention to do so in the future.

### On submitting multiple applications and ranking the tracks ...

You cannot submit several applications and it will not improve your chances. If you submit several applications you will be disqualified. Do not submit more than one application.

## On the role of educational achievement in the selection process ...

We will consider what your formal education is, but you will not be disqualified if you do not have a formal diploma or degree. Formal education plays a role in terms of how we evaluate your application as a whole. We really are looking for Fellows who are demonstrated leaders in their communities and their countries. Africa is a diverse continent and we know that leaders come to their achievements through both formal and informal means.

## On what we expect upon your return to Africa ...

We hope that you bring back new skills and new enthusiasm. What we really hope for is a multiplier effect — that you share with your friends, family and colleagues what you saw, learned, and perhaps taught others in the U.S. so that this experience grows. And we hope that you continue to stay in touch with us.

# Climate Change and Agriculture in Africa

David Michael Terungwa of the African Green Movement provided the guest blog post below. Learn more about the African Green Movement at <a href="https://www.gifsep.org">www.gifsep.org</a>.

Members of the GIFSEP Nigeria chapter stand with an African **▼** Green Movement banner after an Executive Meeting.

Agriculture is the primary medium through which climate change will impact people, ecosystems and economies. According to the Fourth Assessment Report (AR4) of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), this is no longer a potential threat but a conclusive, inevitable reality. Rainfall is generally expected to become more variable; floods are expected to become more common; droughts are expected to be more intense and last longer, while sea-levels are expected to rise. The net effect of all these impacts is reduced food. Understanding the dynamics of current variability and future climate change as they affect food supply and demand across all sectors and enhancing the capacity to respond is crucial. Smart and sustainable Agriculture has become of urgent and of crucial importance. For society to progress towards sustainable development, education must engage the youth. However, most youths in Africa see agriculture as a dirty man's

job, forgetting that Agriculture remains the major source of employment in Africa.

Farmers in Africa are getting older – much older. Retirement is increasingly a mirage for the thousands of farmers who continue working into their late 70s and even into their mid-80s. Farmers are working significantly longer hours compared to the rest of the workforce. Rates of depression and suicide among farmers and agricultural workers are more than double the average for the non-agricultural workforce.

The reality is that we African youths can't spend our way out of hunger, poverty and unemployment in Africa. But hard work from everyone can do wonders. And it has be hard work with our hands, not just our brains.

One of the ways to mitigate the effects of climate change is Smart Agriculture.

Here is an example of Smart Agriculture: Banana stems hold water for long period of time. Take advantage of this by planting short-rooted stems in banana stems. This is done by making small holes at the stem with a knife or machete and adding a little soil. This allows the plant to grow even during the dry season without irrigation and helps minimize resources and space.

Like our ancestors, farmers have always grown their crops in soil. The threat of food insecurity from climate change makes it necessary to consider alternatives. Hydroponics is a new way of planting that does not use soil. Plants can grow in other media such as gravel, sand, coconut fiber.

Banana stems are usually thrown away after the fruit is removed, whereas processed banana stems have many uses. Banana stems are a very good medium for vegetable gardening and planting mushrooms. Banana stems contain a lot of starch that can act as a plant nutrient. Banana trees also have important compounds such as anthraquinone, saponins, and flavonoids that both benefit humans and help plants absorb nutrients.

Nettie Wiebe once said "I often say to people, what happens in the food system is of no concern to you if you're never going to eat again. But if you're intending to have breakfast, lunch or dinner, what happens to small-scale farmers, what happens to seeds, what happens to water, matters to you, because your lunch depends on it."

David Michael Terungwa at the GIFSEP Farm in Abuja, Nigeria. (Photo courtesy Terungwa)

This guest blog was adapted from a post on the YALI Network face2face Facebook Group.

About David Michael Terungwa: I am a Mentor with the Climate Reality Project and the President of GIFSEP (African Green Movement). I am a First class graduate of Soil and Water Conservation Engineering. I also hold a Post Graduate Certificate in Renewable Energy. Changing the world around me through teaching agricultural and Environmental sustainability is my strongest desire.

About African Green Movement: an initiative for food security and ecosystem preservation, with members from Nigeria, Tanzania, Rwanda and Kenya. Learn more at <a href="https://www.gifsep.org">www.gifsep.org</a> and <a href="https://www.gifsep.org">www.gi

The views and opinions expressed here belong to the author and do not necessarily reflect those of the YALI Network or the U.S. government.

# **The Coming Effects of Climate Change**

## Join #YALIGoesGreen this month. Learn how to get involved at yali.state.gov/climate

We asked three 2015 Mandela Washington Fellows who work in the area of climate change what their countrymen need to know about Earth's changing climate and what it will mean for the African continent.

Asha Shaaban remembers growing up in the Laikipia district of Kenya. "My parents said it was like paradise on earth and everything grew in that place. We had pineapples, mangoes, arrowroots. That was less than 20 years ago, but right now none of those crops grow there." "If you don't take care of the natural capital, in a few years' time there'll be nothing. In Kenya, there are so many industries and so many cities coming up, but where are they going to get the water?"

Shaaban is in charge of advocacy for Integrated Water Resources Management, a program in Kenya to build the capacity of communities to ensure environmental sustainability. "Most of the farmers rely on rain-fed agriculture...the long rains used to come in April and then in September, but now it's so unpredictable. I can't remember the last time it rained at home." She sees the irregular rains' effects reaching beyond agriculture and diet into family life. She pointed to pastoralists such as the Maasai. "They end up going over 300 kilometers in search of pasture and water. They leave their homes for over three months and leave their families without fathers, and the homes are led by the women. As much as the energy sector is contributing to climate change, it is the water resources that are actually affected most. It's the water that you need for everyday living."

2015 Mandela Washington Fellow Asha Shaaban

Aicha Mohamed Sako works on data collection for climate change adaptation strategies in Mali. She is starting a small agri-business mainly focused on advice, suitable seeds selection, and adaptation strategies for smallholders under changing climates in Mali. "Farmers need to think about which crops they can use as well as where and when they can save energy to make their businesses sustainable. This is what we do. We try to tell farmers, 'You know your business, but maybe you could change your techniques to be more adaptive."

2015 Mandela Washington Fellow Aicha Mohamed Sako

Andrew Chikomba's company, Gemwitts Enterprises, works with SNV, an international non-profit development organization, to bring technology and renewable solutions to rural Zimbabweans. "I believe there are a lot of things, as humanity, we'll lose out on. And you don't know what you've got till it's gone. We should learn from other nations that are actually trying to solve the problem. It's impossible in some instances to correct the mistakes that have been committed, so it's best for us to be prepared, take care of our environment, take care of our future. We have to start doing it now."

2015 Mandela Washington Fellow X Andrew Chikomba